

MCA
VOC FOR IOP/FI:
BACKGROUND NO. 1-0224
ANITA CHAPMAN

FEBRUARY 23, 1976

FOCUS: ROBERT HAYDEN, CONSULTANT IN POETRY
///HOLD FOR RELEASE AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT EXPECTED MONDAY EVENING///

ANNCR:

IN WASHINGTON MONDAY THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS NAMED
AN AMERICAN POET, ROBERT HAYDEN, AS CONSULTANT IN POETRY
FOR THE YEAR NINETEEN-SEVENTY-SIX TO SEVENTY-SEVEN. WITH
MORE ON THIS NOW, VOA'S ANITA CHAPMAN:

VOICE:

ROBERT HAYDEN AT SIXTY-ONE HAS PRODUCED BUT FOUR
BOOKS OF POETRY, THE FIRST WHEN HE WAS ALREADY FIFTY-THREE.
HE HAS BEEN CALLED THE MOST UNDERRATED AND UNRECOGNIZED
POET IN AMERICA.

BUT THAT IS ENDING NOW, WITH HIS APPOINTMENT AS
CONSULTANT IN POETRY TO THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. THE POST
IS THE HIGHEST RECOGNITION THAT CAN BE GIVEN A POET. ROBERT
HAYDEN IS THE FIRST BLACK AMERICAN TO RECEIVE IT.

IN THE SENSE OF ANCESTRY ROBERT HAYDEN IS A BLACK
ARTIST. BUT HE HAS ALWAYS VIEWED THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE AS
BEYOND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE. AND FOR THIS HE HAS BEEN
SEVERELY CRITICIZED BY A GOOD NUMBER OF BLACK WRITERS. AS
THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT GREW IN THE SIXTIES, SO GREW THE
SENSE THAT ALL ART FROM A BLACK HAND SHOULD ADVANCE THE
CAUSE OF BLACKNESS. ROBERT HAYDEN WENT HIS WAY, QUIETLY
REFUSING THIS DEFINITION OF ART. "THERE IS GOOD LITERATURE
AND BAD LITERATURE," HE OFTEN SAID, "BUT NO SUCH THING AS
BLACK LITERATURE."

AND YET ONE OF HIS LONGER WORKS, A DESCRIPTION OF
THE ATLANTIC CROSSING OF CAPTURED AFRICANS, HAS BEEN

TERMED ONE OF THE TWO FINEST POEMS BY NEGROES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. SO IT IS NOT THE BLACK EXPERIENCE HE IGNORES. BUT BLACKNESS, AS SOMEONE SAID, IS NOT ENOUGH TO CONTAIN HIM.

MISTER HAYDEN IS A NORTHERNER, EDUCATED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN WHERE HE HAS TAUGHT COURSES IN LITERATURE AND CREATIVE WRITING FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS. FOR A LONGER PERIOD, HE TAUGHT AT A LEADING SOUTHERN BLACK UNIVERSITY, FISK, IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, WHERE HIS INFLUENCE WAS LEFT ON A SCORE OF ASPIRING WRITERS.

ROBERT HAYDEN IS A HIGHLY DISCIPLINED POET WHO LEAVES THE READER WITH THE SENSE THAT EACH WORD WAS CHOSEN AFTER LONG SHOPPING THROUGH AVAILABLE CHOICES. BUT THROUGH THE SPARSE STYLE, HE CAN TRANSMIT PASSION LIKE A RAY FROM A LASER. "WORDS ARE YOUR TOOLS," HE TOLD HIS CLASSES AT FISK. "NO MATTER HOW IMPORTANT YOUR MESSAGE, THE WORDS MUST EXPRESS IT."

THOUGH THE PRESENT APPOINTMENT IS A CROWNING HONOR FOR ROBERT HAYDEN, THERE HAVE BEEN OTHERS. TEN YEARS AGO AT THE FIRST WORLD FESTIVAL OF BLACK ARTS IN DAKAR, SENEGAL, HE WAS AWARDED THE GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY. AND LAST YEAR HE WAS MADE A FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS. NOW AS CONSULTANT IN POETRY, HE WILL COME LATER THIS YEAR TO BE WASHINGTON'S POET-IN-RESIDENCE.

-0-

///NOTE EMBARGO///

PY